

Washington, DC – Members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), honors and remembers civil rights activist and American Hero, Fred Korematsu, who died Wednesday, March 30, 2005.

Fred Korematsu was born in Oakland, California, on January 30, 1919 and was the third of four sons of Japanese immigrants. An American citizen by birth, Mr. Korematsu was nonetheless among the Americans of Japanese heritage ordered to report to World War II internment camps in 1942. He defied the order, because he believed that his Constitutional rights had been violated by the forced internment order, given without evidence, specific charges, or a trial.

“Fred Korematsu should be remembered for his courageous actions by taking great steps toward fulfilling the promises entailed in our Constitution. His is a life worth remembering; his defiance a testament to the potential for greatness within every ordinary American; his story a reminder of the progress our country has made, and a beacon keeping us ever hopeful for a better future,” said Rep. Mike Honda.

“Fred Korematsu was a man of courage who stood tall for his principles. While there are individuals who demonstrate their courage under fire, there are others, such as Fred Korematsu, who display greater courage on legal and social battlefields as champions of our democratic ideals and civil liberties. We were fortunate that Fred Korematsu was determined to stand up and declare that the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II was wrong,” said Senator Daniel Inouye.

“Fred Korematsu stood for equality and civil rights during one of our nation's darkest and most unjust periods. His courage, and the resolve with which he fought for those fundamental principles, is an enduring gift to our country. I join all Americans in mourning his passing,” said Rep. Doris Matsui.

“Every American owes a big debt to Fred Korematsu. At a time when it counted he stood up for justice, equality and our Constitution. He showed that one person can make a difference. That’s a gift that will outlast all of us,” said Rep. Neil Abercrombie.

“When the force of wartime hysteria darkened the light of justice, Fred Korematsu vigilantly sought to protect the constitutional guarantees of all citizens. He inspired us to fight for justice and challenged us to reaffirm our nation’s commitment to civil rights. We are grateful for his legacy and inspiration and I wish to extend my deepest condolences to his family,” said Rep. Xavier Becerra.

Mr. Korematsu sued the government and appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court. He lost the landmark Korematsu v. the United States by a vote of 6 to 3 in 1944. In the early 1980s, Peter Irons – a professor of Political Science at University of California, San Diego – discovered documents and reports describing government claims of Japanese American spying as “intentional falsehoods.”

On November 10, 1983, Judge Marilyn Hall Patel of the San Francisco Federal District Court overturned Mr. Korematsu’s conviction and held that the orders maintained were tainted by racism and that the United States Government had illegally suppressed, altered and destroyed evidence critical to the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision.

In 1998, President Clinton acknowledged Mr. Korematsu’s role by awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our nation’s highest civilian award. Mr. Korematsu is survived by his wife Kathryn, his son Ken, and his daughter Karen Korematsu-Haigh.